Christian views on magic

Christian views on magic vary widely among denominations and among individuals. Some Christians actively condemn any form of magic as satanic, holding that it opens the way for demonic possession. Others simply dismiss it as superstition. Conversely, some branches of esoteric Christianity actively engage in magical practices.

Contents

Biblical references

Early Christianity

Medieval views
- Martin Luther

Modern views
- Christian opposition to witchcraft
- Magic in literature

Syncretic religions involving Christianity and witchcraft

See also

References

Bibliography

Further reading

External links

Biblical references

There are several references to witchcraft in the Bible that strongly condemn such practices. For example, Deuteronomy 18:11-12 condemns anyone who "..casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you", and Exodus 22:18 states "Do not allow a sorceress to live" (or in the King James Bible "thou shalt not suffer a witch to live"). It has also been suggested that the word "witch" might be a mistranslation of "poisoner".[1]

Some adherents of near-east religions acted as mediums, channeling messages from the dead or from a familiar spirit. The Bible sometimes is translated as referring to "necromancer" and "necromancy" (Deuteronomy 18:11). However, some lexicographers, including James Strong and Spiros Zodhiates, disagree. These scholars say that the Hebrew word *kashaph*, used in Exodus 22:18 and 5 other places in the Tanakh comes from a root meaning "to whisper". Strong therefore concludes that the word means "to whisper a spell, *i.e.* to incant or practice magic". The Contemporary English Version translates Deuteronomy 18:11 as referring to "any kind of magic".

Early Christianity

The Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Galatians includes sorcery in a list of "works of the flesh".[2] This disapproval is echoed in the *Didache*,[3] a very early book of church discipline which dates from the mid-late first century.[4]

Medieval views

During the Early Middle Ages, the Christian Churches did not conduct witch trials.[5] The Germanic Council of Paderborn in 785 explicitly outlawed the very belief in witches, and the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne later confirmed the law. Among Orthodox Eastern Christians concentrated in the Byzantine Empire, belief in witchcraft was widely regarded as *deisidaimonia*—superstition—and by the 9th and 10th centuries in the Latin Christian West, belief in witchcraft had begun to be seen as heresy.

However, towards the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the early modern period (post-Reformation), belief in witchcraft became more popular and witches were seen as directly in league with the Devil. This marked the beginning of a period of witch hunts among early Protestants which lasted about 200 years, and in some countries, particularly in North-Western Europe, thousands of people were accused of witchcraft and sentenced to death

The Inquisition within the Roman Catholic Church had conducted trials against supposed witches in the 13th century, but these trials were to punish heresy, of which belief in witchcraft was merely one variety.[5] Inquisitorial courts only became systematically involved in the witch-hunt during the 15th century: in the case of the Madonna Oriente, the Inquisition of Milan was not sure what to do with two women who in 1384 and in 1390 confessed to have participated in a type of white magic.

Not all Inquisitorial courts acknowledged witchcraft. For example, in 1610 as the result of a witch hunting craze the Suprema (the ruling council of the Spanish Inquisition) gave everybody an Edict of Grace (during which confessing witches were *not* to be punished) and put the only dissenting inquisitor, Alonso de Salazar Frías, in charge of the subsequent investigation. The results of Salazar's investigation was that the Spanish Inquisition did not bother witches ever again though they still went after heretics and Crypto-Jews.[6]

Martin Luther

Martin Luther shared some of the views about witchcraft that were common in his time.[7] When interpreting Exodus 22:18,[8] he stated that, with the help of the devil, witches could steal milk merely by thinking of a cow.[9] In his Small Catechism, he taught that witchcraft was a sin against the second commandment[10] and prescribed the Biblical penalty for it in a "table talk":

> On 25 August 1538, there was much discussion about witches and sorceresses who poisoned chicken eggs in the nests, or poisoned milk and butter. Doctor Luther said: "One should show no mercy to these [women]; I would burn them myself, for we read in the Law that the priests were the ones to begin the stoning of criminals."[11]

Modern views

During the Age of Enlightenment, belief in the powers of witches and sorcerers to harm began to die out in the West. But the reasons for disbelief differed from those of early Christians. For the early Christians the reason was theological—that Christ had already defeated the powers of evil. For the post-Enlightenment Christians, the disbelief was based on a belief in rationalism and empiricism.

It was at this time, however, that Western Christianity began expanding to parts of Africa and Asia where premodern worldviews still held sway, and where belief in the power of witches and sorcerers to harm was, if anything, stronger than it had been in Northern Europe. Many African Independent Churches developed their own responses to witchcraft and sorcery.[12]

The situation was further complicated by the rise of new religious movements that considered witchcraft to be a religion. This view does not claim that witches actually consciously enter into a pact with Satan because Satan is not believed to exist in Wicca and other modern neo-pagan witchcraft practices.[12][13]

Christian opposition to witchcraft

Several Christian groups continue to believe in witchcraft and view it as a negative force. Much of the criticism originates among Evangelical Christian groups, especially those of a fundamentalist tendency, who believe that witchcraft is a danger to children. The 2006 documentary *Jesus Camp*, which depicts the life of young children attending Becky Fischer's summer camp, shows Fischer condemning the *Harry Potter* novels and telling the students that "Warlocks are enemies of God" (see also Religious debates over the

Harry Potter series). While Fischer's summer camp has sometimes been incorrectly identified as Pentecostal, Fischer is most closely associated with the neo-Pentecostal movement known as the New Apostolic Reformation. NAR prophet Lou Engle, who serves in the NAR apostolic group The Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders, makes an extended appearance in *Jesus Camp*.

Among Christian tendencies, the NAR is especially aggressive in efforts to counter alleged acts of witchcraft; the NAR's globally distributed "Transformations" pseudo-documentaries by filmmaker George Otis, Jr. show charismatic Christians creating mini-utopias by driving off "territorial spirits" and by banishing or even killing accused witches. During the 2008 United States presidential election, footage surfaced from a 2005 church ceremony in which a NAR apostle, Kenyan bishop Thomas Muthee, called upon God to protect Sarah Palin, as Muthee laid hands on Palin, from "every form of witchcraft".

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI denounced belief in witchcraft during a visit to Angola.[14]

Modern Christian views vary as to whether witchcraft is a *general* term for communion with evil, or a *specific* form of religious system and practice. Christians often espouse the idea that Satan and evil are real, while condemning accusations of witchcraft found throughout history as dubious.

Magic in literature

Magic in literature, while condemned by some Christians, is often viewed by Christians as non-evil. The key distinction would be between real-life magic and pretend magic. This view holds that in real life, practice of supernatural abilities (i.e. magic) must have a supernatural power source or origin, which would be either holy or evil. Thus born of Holy Spirit or of demons. (See Spiritual gift and Christian demonology for details on these teachings.) Thus, magic in the Biblical context would be viewed as only an act of evil, whereas in literature, pretend magic is a morally neutral tool available to conduct both good and bad behaviors.

In literature, magical abilities have many different power sources. Technological ability (science) can appear as magic.[15] Often, wielding magic is accomplished by imposing one's will by concentration and/or use of devices to control an external magical force. This explanation is offered for the Force in *Star Wars*, magic in *Dungeons and Dragons*, and magic in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The latter two works are by notable Christians, C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, respectively. In the first chronological book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Magician's Nephew*, Lewis specifically explains that magic is a power available on other worlds, not on Earth. The Empress Jadis (later, the White Witch) was tempted to use magic for selfish reasons to retain control of her world Charn, which ultimately lead to the destruction of life there.

Syncretic religions involving Christianity and witchcraft

From 15th to 19th century, many Hermeticists combined Christianity with occult practices (mostly alchemy). Another notable example of syncretism is Santería, a syncretic hybrid of African animism and Christianity. There are also those who practice a combination of Neopagan/Wiccan and Christian beliefs. Other modern syncretic traditions include mesoamerican folk healing traditions, such as the *curandisimo* practices found in Mexico, and Andean folk healing traditions of Peru and Bolivia.

See also

- Thomas Ady
- Benedicaria
- Christianity and Neopaganism
- Christianity and Paganism
- Christian Kabbalah
- Christian views on astrology
- Esoteric Christianity
- Folk Catholicism
- Folk Christianity
- Magic and religion
- *Malleus Maleficarum*

- Nehushtan
- Saducismus Triumphatus
- The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark
- The Discoverie of Witchcraft
- Wonders of the Invisible World
- Anton Praetorius

References

1. "Thou Shalt Not Suffer a Witch to Live: A Murderous Mistranslation?" (https://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/thoushalt-not-suffer-a-witch-to-live-a-murderous-mistranslation-1.5443682) by Elizabeth Sloane, at Haaretz.com, 17 August 2017.
2. Galatians 5:19-21
3. Apostles didachē (1884). *Teaching of the twelve Apostles, tr from the 'editio princeps' of Bryennios, by A. Gordon* (https://books.google.com/books?id=Sp8CAAAAQAAJ) (Original from Oxford University), p. 7. Retrieved 20 October 2013.
4. Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (Oxford University Press) ISBN 978-0-19-280290-3): *Didache*
5. Cohn, Norman: "Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom." London: Sussex University Press, 1975
6. 1978 "A witch with three toes too many"; Out of this World Encyclopedia 23:9-12
7. Karant-Nunn, Susan C.; Wiesner-Hanks, Merry E. (2003). *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook*. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press. p. 228.
8. Exodus 22:18
9. *Sermon on Exodus, 1526*; *WA* 16, 551 f.
10. Martin Luther, Luther's Little Instruction Book (http://www.ProjectWittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/little.book/web/book-1.html#b) Trans. Robert E. Smith, (Fort Wayne: Project Wittenberg, 2004), Small Catechism 1.2.
11. *WA Tr* 4:51–52, no. 3979 quoted and translated in Karant-Nunn, 236. The original Latin and German text is: "25, Augusti multa dicebant de veneficis et incantatricibus, quae ova ex gallinis et lac et butyrum furarentur. Respondit Lutherus: Cum illis nulla habenda est misericordia. Ich wolte sie selber verprennen, more legis, ubi sacerdotes reos lapidare incipiebant.
12. Hayes, Stephen. 1995. Christian responses to witchcraft and sorcery, in Missionalia, Vol. 23(3) November. Pages 339-354. "Archived copy" (https://web.archive.org/web/20070415185117/http://hayesfam.bravehost.com/WITCH1.HTM). Archived from the original (http://hayesfam.bravehost.com/WITCH1.HTM) on 2007-04-15. Retrieved 2007-04-15.
13. U.S. Department of the Army "Religious Requirements and Practices of Certain Selected Groups: A Handbook for Chaplains": "It is very important to be aware that Wiccans do not in any way worship or believe in "Satan", "the Devil", or any similar entities."
14. "Pope warns Angola of witchcraft" (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7956460.stm). BBC. March 21, 2009. Retrieved 2010-04-04.
15. Arthur C. Clarke. "Profiles of The Future", 1961 (Clarke's third law)

Bibliography

- Cohn, Norman (1975). *Europe's inner demons*. London: Sussex University Press. ISBN 0-435-82183-0.
- Fox, Robin Lane (1987). *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Knopf. ISBN 0-394-55495-7.
- Hutton, Ronald (1991). *Pagan religions of the ancient British Isles*. Oxford: Blackwell. ISBN 0-631-17288-2.
- Williams, Charles (1959). *Witchcraft*. New York: Meridian.

Further reading

Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power by Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith, Princeton University Press. 1999

External links

- *Catholic Encyclopedia* "Occult Art, Occultism"
- *Catholic Encyclopedia* "Witchcraft"

Retrieved from 'https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Christian_views_on_magic&oldid=889181940'

This page was last edited on 24 March 2019, at 01:13 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.